

Introduction to
Religious and Moral practice
of Sikhism

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Abstract

Sikhism is one of the religions which do not follow any kind of superstitions beliefs. It defines from Hinduism and Islam. Still it enriched more advanced than the Hinduism and Islam the way they follow their rituals and beliefs. In Sikhism the child marriage is strictly prohibited. And also the rights between husband and wife equally distributed and the widows can remarry. Sikhism believes in one God and everyone is follower of that God. The Sikh God is beyond description Sikhs feel able to pray to God as a person and a friend who cares for them. Sikhs regard prayer as a way of spending time in company with God. For prayer to be really effective a person tries to empty themselves of everything of this world so that they can perceive God. Guru Arjan wrote of the importance of prayer "The praising of his name is the highest of all practices. It has uplifted many a human soul. It slakes the desire of restless mind; it imparts an all – seeing vision."

Key Words

Hinduism, Islam, Spiritual, Religion, community,
Ceremony, God, Worship

Introduction

Sikhism was born in the Punjab area of South Asia, which now falls into the present day states of India and Pakistan. The main religions of the area at the time were Hinduism and Islam.

The Sikh faith began around 1500 CE, when Guru Nanak began teaching a faith that was quite distinct from Hinduism and Islam. Nine Gurus followed Nanak and developed the Sikh faith and community over the next centuries.

Their philosophy and beliefs

There is only one God. He is the same God for all people of all religions. The soul goes through cycles of births and deaths before it reaches the human form. The goal of our life is to lead an exemplary existence so that one may merge with God. Sikhs should remember God at all times and practice living a virtuous and truthful life while maintaining a balance between their spiritual obligations and temporal obligations. The true path to achieving

salvation and merging with God does not require renunciation of the world or celibacy, but living the life of a householder, earning an honest living and avoiding worldly temptations and sins. Sikhism condemns blind rituals such as fasting, visiting places of pilgrimage, superstitions, worship of the dead, idol worship etc. Sikhism preaches that people of different races, religions, or sex are all equal in the eyes of God. It teaches the full equality of men and women. Women can participate in any religious function or perform any Sikh ceremony or lead the congregation in prayer.

Moral of their religious practices

The founder of the Sikh religion was Guru Nanak who was born in 1469. He preached a message of love and understanding and criticized the blind rituals of the Hindus and Muslims. Guru Nanak passed on his enlightened leadership of this new religion to nine successive Gurus. The final living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh died in 1708. During his lifetime Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa order (meaning 'The Pure'), soldier-saints. The

Khalsa uphold the highest Sikh virtues of commitment, dedication and a social conscious. The Khalsa are men and women who have undergone the Sikh baptism ceremony and who strictly follow the Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions and wear the prescribed physical articles of the faith. One of the more noticeable is being the uncut hair (required to be covered with a turban for men) and the Kirpan (ceremonial sword). Before his death in 1708 Guru Gobind Singh declared that the Sikhs no longer needed a living and appointed his spiritual successor as Sri Guru Granth Sahib, his physical successor as the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh felt that all the wisdom needed by Sikhs for spiritual guidance in their daily lives could be found in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Sri Guru Granth Sahib is unique in the world of religious scriptures because not only is it accorded the status of being the spiritual head of the Sikh religion, but besides the poetry of the Gurus, it also contains the writings of saints of other faiths whose thoughts were consistent with those of the Sikh Gurus.

Sikhism does not have priests, which were abolished by Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru felt that they had become corrupt and full of ego. Sikhs only have custodians of the Guru Granth Sahib (granthi), and any Sikh is free to read the Guru Granth Sahib in the Gurdwara (a Sikh temple) or in their home. All people of all religions are welcome to the Gurdwara. A free community kitchen can be found at every Gurdwara which serves meals to all people of all faiths. Guru Nanak first started this institution which outlines the basic Sikh principles of service, humility and equality.

The most significant historical religious center for the Sikhs is Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple) at Amritsar in the state of Punjab in northern India. It is the inspirational and historical center of Sikhism but is not a mandatory place of pilgrimage or worship. All places where Sri Guru Granth Sahib is installed are considered equally holy for Sikhs. Sikhs derive their ethics largely from the teachings of their scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and the Sikh Code of Conduct (the Rehat Maryada). Guidance also comes from the example set by the gurus and from the experience of the Sikh community over the last 500 years. Sikhs have a

high respect for life which they see as a gift from God. Most Sikhs are against euthanasia, as they believe that the timing of birth and death should be left in God's hands. And also the Sikh Gurus rejected suicide (and by extension, euthanasia) as an interference in God's plan. Suffering, they said, was part of the operation of karma, and human beings should not only accept it without complaint but act so as to make the best of the situation that karma has given them. This is not absolute. Sikhism (as already said) believes that life is a gift from God, but it also teaches that we have a duty to use life in a responsible way. Therefore Sikhs contemplating euthanasia for themselves or others should look at the whole picture, and make appropriate distinctions between ending life, and not artificially prolonging a terminal state. They are giving more important to care for others and Much of Sikh moral teaching is devoted to caring for others who are less fortunate. This suggests that the Sikh reaction to situations where people think about euthanasia would be to provide such good care that euthanasia became an unattractive option.

Their rituals and religious ceremony

Sikhs who have been through the Amrit Ceremony of initiation, or Amrit Sanskar, become baptised Sikhs, take new names, and wear the 5 Ks. The Amrit Ceremony is the initiation rite introduced by Guru Gobind Singh when he founded the Khalsa in 1699. A Sikh can go through this initiation as soon as they are old enough to understand the full commitment that they are making. The ceremony takes place in a Gurdwara, before the Guru Granth Sahib, and in the presence of 5 initiated Sikhs (who represent the Panj Piyaras, the first 5 Sikhs to be initiated). During the ceremony, hymns are recited from the Sikh scripture, prayers are said, and the principles of Sikhism are affirmed. Then amrit is prepared. Amrit is a mixture of sugar and water that has been stirred with a double-edged sword. The candidates for initiation drink some of the amrit from the same bowl, and have it sprinkled on their eyes and hair. Each then recites the Mool Mantra (the fundamentals of Sikhism). There are readings from the Guru Granth Sahib and an explanation of rules of Sikhism. The ceremony ends with the eating of the ceremonial karah parshad. Parshad

is a sweet tasting food which has been blessed. It is made from semolina, sugar and ghee.

The Sikh marriage is called Anand Karaj. This form of marriage was introduced from the time of the Sikh Gurus and was given statutory recognition during the British rule in India by the Anand Marriage Act 1909. According to the centrally approved Sikh Code (Sikh Reht Maryada), persons not professing the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony. Grown-up Sikh boys and girls get married when they are fully able to take on the responsibilities of married life. Child marriage is forbidden. Sikh marriages may be arranged and assisted by parents but this is not necessary. Boys and girls may meet directly and get married. Religious guidance is that a Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock without giving thought to the prospective spouse's caste. An engagement ceremony may take place before the wedding but this is not necessary. Any day suitable to the parties is fixed without regard to any superstition about auspicious, good or bad days. Hindu types of marriage rituals are strictly forbidden. Most marriages take place in the morning. The

ceremony starts with a meeting of the two sides called Milni at which holyshabads (hymns from the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib) are sung. Often an Ardaas (supplication) is also said at the Milni (not prescribed). The two sides say the Sikh greeting to each other with "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" (Khalsa belongs to the Wondrous Giver of Knowledge; to whom belong victory.)

The marriage ceremony takes place at a congregational gathering in the holy presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Shabads(Sikh hymns) are sung and the boy and the girl sit side by side facing Guru Granth Sahib. The girl sits on the left side of the boy. The couple and their parents (or guardians) stand up and an Ardaas is offered, seeking the Blessing of Waheguru (the Wondrous Giver of Knowledge) for the commencement of the Anand marriage. Any Amritdhari Sikh (man or woman who has undergone traditional Amrit initiation and therefore practices the prescribed Sikh code in daily life) can perform a marriage ceremony. This officiating person apprises the couple of the duties of married life according to the Guru's teachings.

He explains their mutual obligations as husband and wife. Sikh husband-wife love is modelled on the love between human soul and the Supreme Soul as described in the four lavan (hymns composed by the Fourth Guru in the Suhi raag section of Guru Granth Sahib). The bridegroom and the bride vow fidelity to each other in the presence of the Guru (Granth Sahib) and the holy congregation. They accept their obligations by bowing before Guru Granth Sahib. The Anand marriage is a sacrament and no document is necessary. The main ceremony is very simple. The bridegroom wears a sash over his shoulder. The end of this is placed (by the bride's father, guardian or any other responsible person) in the hands of the bride. The officiating person reads the four lavan (stanzas) from Guru Granth Sahib. After the reading of the first stanza, the couple rises and to the accompaniment of music, while the same hymn is sung by theragis (religious singers), walk slowly round Guru Granth Sahib, and the bridegroom leading the bride. After returning to their position in front of Guru Granth Sahib after each of the four hymns (lavan), they should remain standing while the next stanza is read

before commencing the next circumambulation while the same stanza is sung by the ragis. (However, these days, couples prefer to sit down after each circumambulation of Guru Granth Sahib. Apparently, although cumbersome, this seems to have become acceptable.) After the four lavan, the hymn of Anand Sahib is read by the ragis. There is an Ardaas (supplication) of completion of the ceremony. Holy Vaak (random reading of a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib) is read out and the holy sweet pudding Karah Pasad is distributed to all present.

Conclusion

Sikhs believe that God is visible in the Sikh congregation or Sangat, and that God is pleased by the act of serving the Sangat. Congregational Sikh worship takes place in a Gurdwara. Sikh public worship can be led by any Sikh, male or female, who is competent to do so. Sikhs can pray at any time and any place. A Sikh aims to get up early, bath, and then start the day by meditating on God. There are set prayers that a Sikh should recite in the morning and evening, and before going to sleep. Sikhs don't think it

pleases God if people pay no attention to others and simply devote themselves slavishly to religion. Sikhism doesn't ask people to turn away from ordinary life to get closer to God. In fact it demands that they use ordinary life as a way to get closer to God. A Sikh serves God by serving (seva) other people every day. By devoting their lives to service they get rid of their own ego and pride. Many Sikhs carry out chores in the Gurdwara as their service to the community. These range from working in the kitchen to cleaning the floor. The Langar, or free food kitchen, is a community act of service. Sikhs also regard caring for the poor or sick as an important duty of service. The three duties that a Sikh must carry out can be summed up in three words; Pray, Work, Give.